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SUBJECT: GUATEMALA: RECENT CRIME EVENTS AND TRENDS

REF: 10 GUATEMALA 27

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: As violent crime continues to be a significant issue for Guatemala, with police struggling to address gang and street crime, and citizens taking the law into their own hands more frequently, 2009 police statistics show an increase from 2008 and 2007 for almost all reported criminal acts, including homicide and robbery. The following are just some of the recent notable criminal events impacting Guatemalan government facilities and personnel, American citizen visitors, Mission employees, and in the residential areas of Mission personnel. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On January 13, 2010, at approximately 0930 hours, in Zone 1 of Guatemala City and within 1.5 miles of the Embassy, an explosion occurred inside the "Transportes Sanaratecos" bus station, injuring 4 adults and 1 minor. Reports from the Guatemalan National Police (Polic-a Nacional Civil (PNC)) stated the grenade was thrown into the station by an individual riding a passing motorcycle.

¶3. (U) On January 7, 2010, at approximately 0200 hours, a local restaurant owner and US citizen, well-known in the Mission community, was shot and killed while driving in Zone 9, within 0.5 miles of the Embassy and Mission personnel residences. The victim's car was disabled during the initial attack, at which time the assailants exited from their vehicle and shot the victim again at close range.

¶4. (U) On January 5, 2010, at approximately 1430 hours, in Zone 1 of Guatemala City and within 2 miles of the Embassy, a grenade exploded next to a bus from Nicaragua, injuring 4 nearby pedestrians. The PNC believes the grenade may have been thrown from a hotel room above the attack site.

¶5. (U) On January 5, 2010, a US citizen visiting Guatemala for the holidays was shot and killed by two men on motorcycles as he was leaving a medical clinic in Zone 9, within 0.5 miles of the Embassy and Mission personnel residences.

¶6. (SBU) On November 27, 2009, at approximately 1330 hours in the city of SololC!, local residents, enraged over a recent incident where extortionists had killed a bus driver and two passengers, stormed the PNC station where the suspects were being held. The mob executed the three suspects and then set the bodies on fire in the town square. During the melee, numerous vehicles as well as the police station were burned. Five policemen were also injured during the incident. SololC! is a common transit route for Mission

personnel taking holiday and weekend travel to Lake Atitlan. One Mission employee witnessed the event and two other employees were caught up in the ensuing traffic jam just outside of town. Note: This style of attack is called "lynching" in Guatemala and refers to any type of execution by mob, usually by hitting, stoning, and then burning the victim with fuel. Although acts of lynching in the rural areas of Guatemala are relatively common occurrences due to inadequate police presence and enforcement capabilities, there has been a significant increase of reported cases in 2009, including in more urban areas. End Note.

¶7. (SBU) On November 18, 2009, at approximately 0930 hours, a Mission employee on foot in Zone 10 and within 0.25 miles of Mission residences, was approached by two men exiting a BMW sedan, who without presenting a weapon, asked him for his cell phone and money. The employee complied and the suspects departed the scene without further incident.

¶8. (SBU) On November 10, 2009, at approximately 1200 hours, a Mission employee and his girlfriend were walking near Mission personnel residences when a man in a SUV pulled up and pointed a gun at them in an attempted robbery. The employee pushed his girlfriend aside, started yelling, and the assailant, apparently startled, drove away without further incident.

¶9. (SBU) On November 10, 2009, in the parking lot of "Pollo Campero" in Zone 15, a restaurant frequented by Mission personnel and within 0.25 miles of Mission residences, a passenger of one vehicle fired multiple rounds at the driver of another vehicle, injuring the presumed target. A Mission employee in the restaurant witnessed the event and waited at the scene to provide a report to the police, however the PNC departed without questioning witnesses.

¶10. (SBU) On October 14, 2009, at approximately 0330 hours, a Mission employee and companion were driving in Zone 10 of Guatemala City when they were subject to a police vehicle stop. Four uniformed PNC officers demanded 2000 Quetzales (approximately \$241 USD) in return for their release. The companion was driven to an ATM by the police while the employee remained in her vehicle under guard. Both victims were released unharmed after payment of the 2000 Quetzales.

¶11. (SBU) On August 24, 2009, in the parking lot of a McDonald's in Zone 15, a restaurant frequented by Mission personnel and within 2 blocks of Mission residences, a Guatemalan pedestrian was shot and killed by a passenger in a passing vehicle.

¶12. (SBU) On August 21, 2009, at approximately 0800 hours, the son of a Mission employee was driving a vehicle within one block of the Embassy when two armed men on two motorcycles approached his stopped vehicle and robbed him of personal belongings.

¶13. (SBU) Comment: This is just a small sampling of daily criminal acts in Guatemala. Although the recent capture of fugitive and former Guatemalan President Alfonso Portillo made headlines and is a success story for Guatemalan law enforcement, the underlying issues remain (Reftel). According to PNC reports for 2009, there were 6498 recorded homicides (3% increase from 2008, 11% increase from 2007) and 7603 recorded injured in assaults (8.5% increase from 2008, 18% increase from 2007). From these numbers, 49 were killed and 56 injured in acts of lynching in 2009, versus 17 killed and 22 injured in 2008 (65% and 61% increase from 2008, respectively). Also from these numbers, 10 were killed and 65 injured in attacks with explosives in 2009, versus 1 killed and 5 injured in 2008 (90% and 92% increase from 2008, respectively). See below chart for PNC reported annual data.

Homicides 2007		2009		2008
Firearm 5237	4776	Q		5405
Lynching 17	20	49		
Explosive 1	1	10		
Other 1037	984	1034		
Total 6292	5781	6498		

Injured 2008	2007	2009	
Firearm 5212	4480		5573
Lynching 22	32	56	
Explosive 5	4	65	
Other 1721	1722	1909	
Total 6960	6238	7603	

2008	2007	2009
Sexual Assault 318	401	385
Robberies 14457	15578	14802
Kidnappings 98	162	213
Disappearances 1318	1324	1347

¶14. (SBU) Acts of violence against bus companies that don't comply with extortion demands continue to rise annually. Assailants typically target the drivers and assistants, however bystanders are often caught in the crossfire. According to the Guatemalan Office of Human Rights (ProcuradurC-a de los Derechos Humanos (PDH)), there were 192 bus drivers reportedly killed in 2009, 131 in 2008, and 68 in 2007. In addition, 121 bus driver assistants and 52 bus passengers or bystanders were reportedly killed in 2009. Frequently, these attacks occur in close proximity to the Embassy and on roads Mission personnel must use daily in their commutes. The media has recently commented that "El Obelisco", a major intersection near the Embassy and heavily utilized by Mission personnel, is becoming a "red zone" due to all the attacks at this location. This termQs typically reserved for the most dangerous sections of Guatemala City.

¶15. (SBU) Although the Guatemalan national average for homicides is approximately 50 per 100K residents, the PDH has reported for 2009 an average of 113 homicides per 100K in the Department of Guatemala, which includes Guatemala City. In comparison, the 2008 FBI Uniform Crime Report lists the US national average at 5.4 homicides per 100K residents, and Washington, D.C. at 31.4 homicides per 100K residents. The significant increases in the use of explosives, presumably by gangs, as well as the acts of lynching by angered citizens are both disturbing trends that will continue to be monitored. End Comment.  
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